

SAVED FROM THE HOLOCAUST - FIVE TIMES

Let me start this paper by saying that I, mercifully, was never in a concentration camp. However, I came close enough five times to make me appreciate, especially in hindsight, my deliverances.

I was born in 1929 in Frankfurt Germany. At the age of three my family moved to Saarbrücken, which at the time was still under French control. In 1935 after a plebiscite, the whole Saar area became German. It was around that time I began to notice the newspapers carrying daily political cartoons depicting Jews as rats with long hooked noses. After that, school fights between Jewish and non-Jewish children became more frequent, and the whole atmosphere for Jews deteriorated.

In late 1937 or early in 1938, my parents and I were suddenly placed on a train with other Jewish families of Polish descent and were being shipped to Poland. (My father, by this time, had managed to send my two sisters to live with an uncle and aunt in New York. Shortly thereafter, my brother Sidney also managed a visa to the United States.) The train trip across Germany was uneventful. At various stops we were met by Jewish volunteers who gave us sandwiches and other foods to keep us going. After reaching the Polish border, Poland decided that the emigration which was taking place was overwhelming and denied further border crossings. We spent the night in a synagogue and headed back home to our apartment which surprisingly was still intact. This was my first escape from what would have been a sure death.

In November 1938, Crystal Night took place. During the night our apartment was surrounded by German SS troops, and my father was arrested. He was kicked and beaten. Our synagogue was burned, the Torahs desecrated, furniture smashed, and the piano thrown out of the third story window from our religious school. Shortly thereafter, we were evicted from our apartment (which up to that time had served as a way station for Jews trying to cross the border into France) and moved into wooden barracks where we had to share a room with several other families. This motivated my mother to send me to Metz, France, to live with my aunt. After obtaining a visitor pass, and within the train station, I found myself being interrogated by German policemen. They searched my pockets, where they found a mezzuzah. I had to remove the scroll and tell them what it meant. I also had to explain why I had bits of wire in my pockets (I have no idea why), but I was released to start my travels. This was my second escape from Nazi Germany.

After living four months with my aunt, who was very busy operating a clothing store, I was sent to a children's home called Eau Bonne outside of Paris. This was my third save since my aunt, cousins, and nephews were all later killed.

I, in the meantime, saw my mother, who then lived in Paris, several times. My parents had split up--she had gone to Paris because she had relatives there, and my father went to Italy because he thought it would be safer. He guessed right and eventually survived the war, while she perished in 1943 at a concentration camp. While in Eau Bonne, I attended a French school in a nearby village until 1940 when the Germans overran the French. The children from the home left on the last train out of Paris and we were all saved. We wound up at a place called Chateau Mon Tin Tin, a castle-like place near Limoges, France, which was still unoccupied. This was my fourth save.

A year later, in 1941, a group of children from the home ^{was} being organized to leave France and go to the United States. When I learned I was not on the list, I approached an administrator and expressed my wishes to be reunited with my brother who was living in Baltimore by that time. Much to my surprise and good fortune, I found myself on the list; and some time later, I was on a train to Madrid, Spain, and Lisbon, Portugal. A few days after that, I was on a ship heading for New York. I found out later, that another group of children followed us, but the remaining children were picked up by the Germans. This turned out to be my fifth escape. —

I am eternally grateful to the various Jewish organizations such as HIAS and the United Jewish Federation which provided the children's home, transportation to the United States, and support while I was growing up.

Henry Singer

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Aug. 1/3

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Paula's Musings.

Our instructor, at the Auburn Society said: "I want each of you to tell me about yourselves." He, however, never followed up on letting us tell our story. Which was just as well. I gave it some thought though and the following would have been my presentation.

I was born in Germany, and as a child I enjoyed reading. The books around our home were German classics; Goethe, Schiller, and Heine's books were familiar friends. I learned the lovely poems by these authors set to music by the great composers; Schuman, Schubert, Brahms, and Silcher and many others. The Lieder that delighted me were: "The Lorelei," "Sah ein Knab ein Roslein Stehn," "Im wunderbaren Monat May," and many others.

I also played and spent time with my cousins: Uncle Heinrich's and Aunt Rebekka's children, Lily, Tootsie, and Trudie, and Uncle Paul's and Aunt Annie's, Gretel, Paula, Matilda, and Arthur.

The culture of Germany, however, turned from these lovely Lieder to songs that reflected the coming horror under a brutal and criminal dictatorship. Songs such as: "Wenn das Judenblut vom Messer spritzt, dann gehts uns nochmals so gut." still ring in my ears. The translation of which is: "When Jewish blood splashes from our knives, then we'll be well of." And they meant it, because my playmates, my cousins, my uncles and aunts were all murdered. They also murdered my mother and my husband's grandmother.

As challenging and rewarding, as troubled and rich, as difficult and wonderful as my life was and is, I grieve, and shed tears about the loss of my beloved almost everyday.

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Krystallnacht.

That is what they called the occurrence when they burned the Synagogues in Germany on November 9 and 10, 1938. They also came that night, and picked up my father. I was sixteen years old, we were sleeping, when the Nazis came into our bedroom and looked at us innocents sleeping, one of them said gruffly "go back to sleep." "Go back to sleep," sure. When we had the knowledge that some of the Jewish families, whose male member was picked up, later on received the message that he was "auf der Flucht erschossen," which translates that he "was shot, while fleeing."

We lived in Saarbrücken at the time and I had signed up for a sewing class with the Catholic Sisters. Considering the tragedy, I couldn't continue with the class, but inasmuch as I had paid for my membership the previous day, I explained to the Sister what had happened and I asked for a refund. She agreed and walked with me to the office, during our walk there was not a word of sympathy or expression of kindness, although this incident happened over sixty years ago, I still shudder at the coldness that emanated from that woman.

Within a few days the Nazis came again to our apartment and this time they took my brothers and myself (of course in the middle of the night), to a large hall, where we happily were re-united with my father. The gathering was large and the mood was somber.

We were then taken to the railroad station and were herded into railway coaches. The policy and cruelty of herding Jews into boxcars for deportation to concentration camps was still in its ascendancy, therefore the coaches were still comfortable and clean, in line with German standards.

We were on our way to Poland and the concentration camps. But this was 1938, and the Germans hadn't conquered Poland as yet, therefore the Poles would not let trainloads of Jews into their country.

While the powers to be, in Germany and Poland were negotiating our fate, we were unloaded and brought to a large Synagogue (which somehow was not burned down) in a town by the Polish border. My father was very firm in ordering us to hide, and not let them export us. The Poles, however, were adamant and we were returned to Saarbrücken.

Upon our return to Saarbrücken we were re-united with our mother. She had successfully obtained visas at the consulates for my sister and me. My father had been tireless in his efforts to obtain affidavits for us, and one of his childhood friends in New Jersey came through.

My parents packed a large trunk for us to take to the U. S.. Family treasures, such as candle holders, favorite books, clothes, linens, etc., were lovingly packed into this trunk. We, however, regretfully never saw this trunk again. We took a train from Saarbrücken to Hamburg. I was sick and nauseous on this train ride, leaving my parents and brothers to an uncertain fate, among murderers, was traumatic.

Our tickets to the U. S. were on a German ship, the "Hamburg-American Line." As we were about to board, we were checked in by two Nazis in black uniforms, who looked at these two young and pretty girls, and asked "why are you leaving?" Margaret, my sister, replied defiantly "because we are Jewish," they waved us on.

Once on the boat, I recall an instance, when in conversation with some people I

was questioned about my experience with Krystallnacht, when I started to relate what had happened, I felt a sharp poke in my ribs, and heard a whisper "don't talk." Was Gestapo present? What would have been the consequences if in my innocence I had continued telling of our ordeal? I was very seasick all throughout our journey, which took place in February and the ocean was wild. I laid in my cabin and listened to moaning and groaning coming from the surrounding cabins, their expressed misery resonated within me.

There was much ado among the passengers when our ship passed the Statue of Liberty. At the time though, this sculpture was meaningless to me, because I was too mired in misery and burdened with sadness. Decades later, on a visit to the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island they showed a documentary of immigrants, as they left their native country, they parted from their mothers, knowing full well, as I experienced, that they would never see her again.

My aunt and her sister met us in New York and they took us to my aunts apartment. On the way there, they asked us, "how do you like President Roosevelt?" "Fine" I replied. He was a Head of State and he wasn't instrumental in the murder of Jews, therefore I thought he was wonderful.

My uncle Kolber, mother's brother, had had a stroke, he was exceedingly happy to see us. Then my aunt gave us a strong laxative, perhaps to cleanse our system from the 'Old World,' and thus we started our arduous journey in the 'New World.'